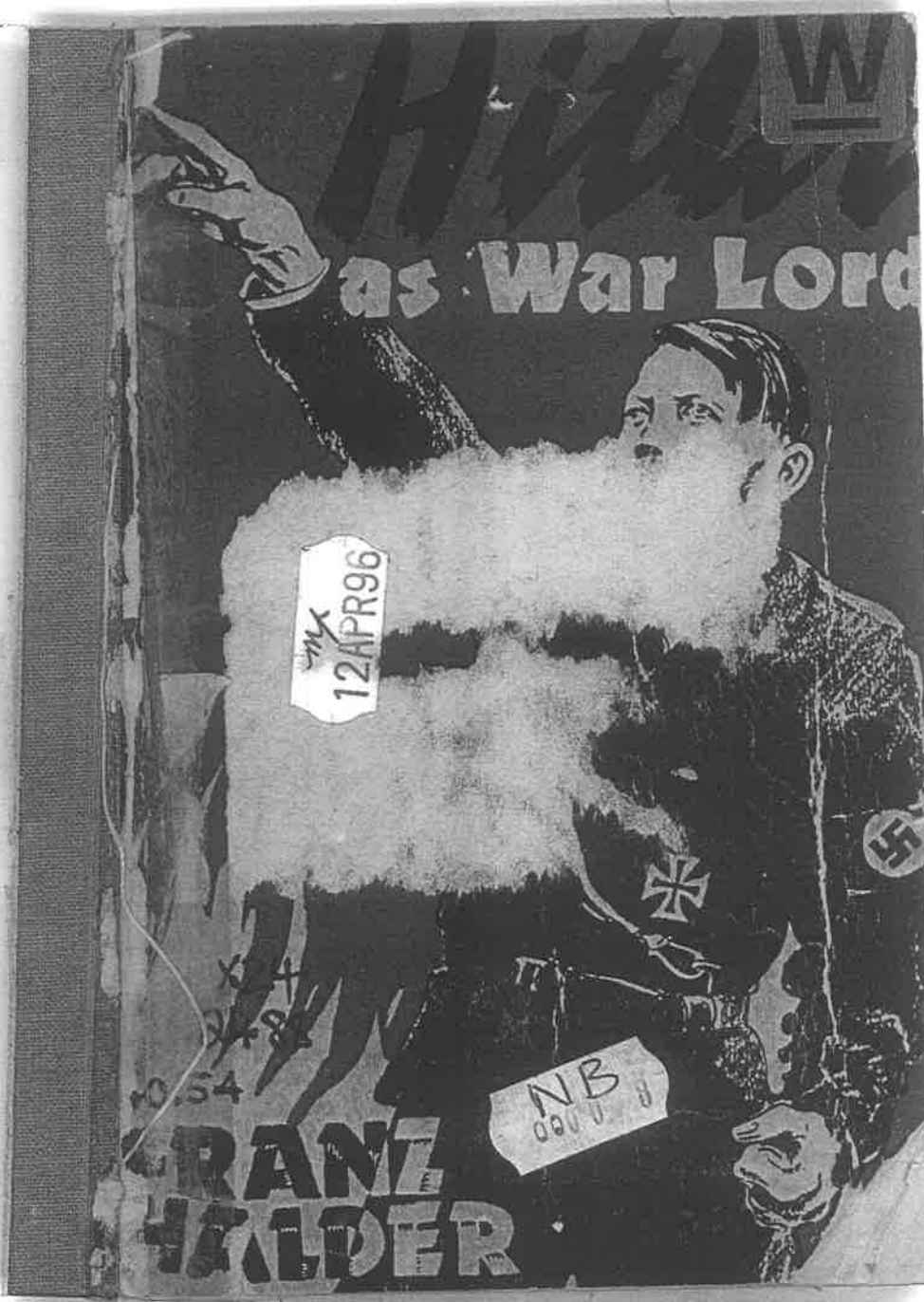


[Empty rectangular box]

[Empty rectangular box]



Hitler as War Lord

my 12 APR 96

X24  
248  
10.54

FRANZ HALDER

NIB  
000 000

# HITLER AS WAR LORD

By  
FRANZ HALDER

*Translated from the*

*German by*

*Paul Findlay*

PRESENTED TO BLDSC

X24 /2488-

PUTNAM

42 GREAT RUSSELL STREET  
LONDON

LIBRA  
**DOCUMENT**

Boston Spa, V. ether  
West Yon

**HITLER ALS FELDHERR**

*First Published in Germany by Münchener Dom-Verlag, 1949*

**HITLER AS WAR LORD**

*First Published in England, March 1950*

**CONTENTS**

|                          | Page vii |
|--------------------------|----------|
| INTRODUCTION             |          |
| I SUPREME COMMAND        | i        |
| II TIMIDITY AND EXCESS   | 12       |
| III WAR                  | 26       |
| IV FROM NORWAY TO AFRICA | 32       |
| V ORDER BARBAROSSA       | 38       |
| VI THE ALPINE FORTRESS   | 64       |

*Printed in Great Britain by Robert Cunningham and Sons Ltd.,  
Longbank Works, Alva*

## INTRODUCTION

THE idea for this book came in the first place from the publisher. For five and a half years millions of German men did their duty, often under conditions of superhuman sacrifice. These men are entitled to know, however belatedly, the story behind the conduct of this war.

Written in broad outline for the benefit of the general reader, this book now discloses the truth, soberly and without distortion or ulterior motive.

The author, who was Chief of the General Staff of the German Army from September 1938 to September 1942, is an expert whose judgment is respected throughout the world. Fully conscious of the risks of misinterpretation, it was only with reluctance and in the hope of performing some service for the German people that he accepted the commission to write such a book.

With high moral restraint he has avoided everything which might have been construed as justification of the Generals. He has resisted the obvious temptation of confusing his account of the war by introducing the question of the extent of the soldier's duty to obey, a question itself arising out of the further question of the moral and political responsibility of the individual.

As a result, this book offers nothing more than a portrait, drawn in convincingly clear outline, of Hitler in his role of the nation's military leader.

May it serve the truth, for it is only by a knowledge of the truth that our people can be saved from further follies, from fatal legends and thus from new guilt and danger.

MÜNCHENER DOM-VERLAG

## HITLER AS WAR LORD

## HITLER AS WAR LORD

8

## I SUPREME COMMAND

FROM the time of the successful campaign in Poland, press and whisper propaganda incessantly proclaimed Hitler as the 'Greatest War Lord in History'. Many people heard it, but how many stopped to think what it really meant? There is no doubt that it was generally realised, even at a time when military terms were being indiscriminately corrupted as party jargon (remember the 'Political Soldier', the 'Battle for Production', the various 'Fronts'), that the phrase implied a supreme ability in the prosecution of war. But very few people had any idea what the prosecution of war really means in these times.

The time when wars were fought and decided by armies alone is long since gone. Then the great military leader was the genius who, with the fire of his spirit, inspired his men to deeds of greatness, whose superlative generalship opened up new roads to success, disconcerting sometimes to the experts.

Modern warfare has developed into a struggle of whole peoples, a struggle which is decided by the total conduct of the nation's affairs—political, economic, intellectual and military.

Certainly the part played by military leadership is important, especially in the minds of the people, whose sons stake their lives under it; but it cannot alone be decisive. There is no place in modern warfare for the great military leader of tradition, the arbiter of destiny. Even at the end of the First World War the whole

conception had passed out of the field of the serious historian and had become merely a tool of the propagandist.

With his overpowering will, Hitler certainly dominated the entire field of war leadership—political to military—and never lost an opportunity of boasting of his sole responsibility. It might then be reasonable to ask whether he could not have created in himself a new conception of the War Leader, a conception altogether wider and more in tune with present-day developments. Perhaps indeed, this phrase, 'the greatest military leader in history', really expressed no more than the extent by which this new form of war leadership surpassed all former ideas on the subject.

In practice, of course, the thing was impossible. It would be beyond the powers of a superman, however great his genius. The phrase was born out of the riotously extravagant self-glorification of the Third Reich and it only needed Hitler's own self-deification after the first military successes to make him believe it.

'All right, then,' it might be said, 'perhaps it was only propaganda. But it can't be denied that in military organisation and armament and especially in the high command of forces Hitler's achievements were unique. After all, he was the creative spirit and the force that powered the machine. So didn't he have every right to claim the military successes as his own?'

It certainly is impossible to deny that Hitler was the dynamo of the war effort. He had an unnatural restlessness of spirit which he attributed to his mission to sweep away everything he had found on his entry into public life. There was no one to follow him, and his work had to be completed during his own short life; consequently every minute was precious. Driven on by

a brutal will and by a creative urge obsessed by a one-track political ideology, this inner pressure became a source of power which certainly maintained vast numbers of wheels in motion, but which often destroyed more of what had grown organically than it was able to re-create.

An example of this was the way he forced the pace for rebuilding the armed forces in the years 1934 to 1938 against the determined resistance of the Army. Again and again the High Command impressed upon him that the value of an army is not dependent solely on its numbers, but above all on its state of training and that this requires a slow organic growth. But it had no effect. Hitler had established himself as the source of power, and his will transcended fact. Years later he flung the taunt in the face of the High Command that he had had to 'drive them to their good fortune'. This 'good fortune' took the form of internal cracks in the jerry-built structure and of weaknesses which Hitler would not admit, despite all the warnings he was given; not even when the strain of war brought them out into the light of day. He was far too bewitched by the magic of numbers. Compare this with the methods of Napoleon—a military leader of true greatness—who, with what might almost be called tender care watched over the internal weaknesses inevitably caused by any rapid massing of strength, and was constantly at pains to overcome them.

Little different was the effect of this dynamo of energy on the structure of the other services and especially on the Air Force, in whose rebirth the restlessness of Hitler's spirit was supported by Goering's unbounded ambition. Here again the Dictator's obsession with numbers and his political impatience

triumphed over the military need for healthy organic growth. Size and numbers were the object of his creative energy to the exclusion of all else.

One thing Hitler never really grasped was the fundamental change in the nature of war which had been brought about by the existence of modern Air Forces.

It was in keeping with the methods he used in conducting his foreign policy and the part which bluff played in them that the Politician Hitler should have demanded the rapid creation of numerically impressive Armed Forces. But however impressive these may have seemed from without, they were in fact encumbered with all the weaknesses of over-rapid growth. Consequently, Hitler the Military Leader should not have allowed Hitler the Politician to confront them with a real emergency—especially as he was repeatedly warned against it by the three Service Chiefs who were always available to advise him and was told continually from 1938 onwards, especially by the Army, that any armed conflict would inevitably spread into a new World War.

From the spring of 1938 onwards Hitler was Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. As such, it was his duty to recognise the limits of what the Forces could do and to see to it that these limits were taken into account in the conduct of politics. His failure, or perhaps his refusal to do this—against all advice—is sufficient ground alone to deny him the right to be called a great military leader.

It is the leader's part not only to create the machine but also to ensure its maintenance and constant improvement. Hitler did not lack the opportunity of

keeping the Army's striking power up to the strength required for its tasks—at least not in the first years of the war or until well into 1943. This was proved by the speed with which the Sixth Army was reformed after its annihilation at Stalingrad. But driven by his will, which refused to acknowledge any limits to possibility, he scattered the formations of the German Army from the North Pole to the Libyan desert, while failing to provide any of the increase in strength which they consequently needed. At the same time he obstinately refused the demands made nearly every day—sometimes in sober statement, sometimes in furious argument—for the timely reinforcement of the hard-pressed Eastern Front.

Until just before Stalingrad, Hitler had stubbornly maintained that the Russians were at their last gasp. Only weaklings would allow themselves to be impressed by their 'dying convulsions'. Final victory over Russia was within reach and needed no new forces, only an iron will. When, under constant pressure from the Army, he did eventually release fresh forces from the reserves at home for service in the East, they were for one thing far too small; but what was worse, he issued an express order that they were not to be used to reinforce the existing Eastern Front divisions which had been bled white by a year's fierce struggle against a superior enemy. Instead, they had to be formed into new divisions. As a result, several fresh and fully manned, but completely raw battle formations, came to the help of the veteran Eastern divisions which by then had been reduced to a skeleton of staff and supply troops. The organisational intermixture of one with the other, which alone held out any promise of success, he expressly forbade, in the hope that the appearance

of new Divisional numbers in the German line would finally take the heart out of the supposedly dying enemy.

If anybody looks into the documents of that period, now no longer in Germany, he will stand aghast before this organisational feat of the 'great military leader'. It cost the young formations unnecessary losses and the exhausted divisions of veteran Eastern Front fighters the rest of their strength.

Again, in the summer of 1942 when, under ceaseless pressure from the Army, Hitler finally decided to make available 100,000 surplus ground staff of the Air Force to help swell the continually shrinking numbers of the Eastern Army, the same mistake was made despite the most urgent advice to the contrary. Instead of incorporating these raw reinforcements into the severely depleted Eastern divisions and thereby rapidly turning them into fully effective troops, Hitler ordered the creation of new ground warfare formations in the form of 'Air Force Field Divisions', which would still remain part of the Air Force. With their lack of training in ground warfare and their lack of experience these formations could be of only very small value in battle.

It was at this time that Goering said to Hitler: 'If you order me to give up men for the war on land, then I'll do it. But I wouldn't think of letting my National Socialist boys go into the Army, where some general or other would probably get the idea of sending them to church.'

Is the spirit of a war-leader shown here? The same spirit made Hitler say in 1942, apropos of the suggestion made at that time that the many volunteers then coming forward should be used primarily to fill the gaps in the Army: 'Anyone who volunteers to-day must be an enthusiastic National Socialist. He doesn't want

to go into a conservative Army, but to where the spirit is National Socialist, to the S.S. or the Air Force—apart from a few adventurers who prefer the water.'

These are only a few examples of the mentality which gave rise to Hitler's feats of military organisation. Their number is unending.

In the last phases of the tragedy, Nazi Party Offices formed military formations out of children and old men. They were barely equipped with weapons, were without communications equipment, almost without supplies. But with high-sounding orders they were thrown against a well-equipped enemy and given tasks for which even élite formations in full battle order had proved inadequate. Is that military genius at work? Or is it not rather a sign of insanity that a man should think himself capable of making up for military training and weapons by Party fanaticism, and the requirements of organisation by the power of his will? In Hitler's character there was no trace of the true leader's responsibility for the troops in his charge.

It can be a sign of a leader's greatness if in moments of crisis he is prepared without flinching to face the prospect of heavy losses among his troops. But the real art of generalship lies in restricting these occasions to a minimum—that is if they cannot be avoided altogether. To bring them about deliberately and recklessly and against the serious warnings of experts and of commanders pleading for their troops—that does not make for greatness.

But this is exactly what happened during the advance in the East as a direct result of decisions made personally by Hitler; for example, in the north by the crazy attack on Tikhvin, and in the south by the simultaneous launching of inadequate forces in the directions both

of the Caucasus and of Stalingrad—a curiously incomprehensible move, even to the layman. It happened above all during the retreat, as a result of Hitler's impossible order not to give up a single inch of ground.

The common practice—begun in 1944—of declaring places selected at random to be 'Strong Points' had the same effect—that of sacrificing the troops holding them, regardless of the fact that there was not the slightest hope of ever relieving these 'Strong Points' when once they had been left to themselves.

For Hitler these sons, brothers and husbands who faced the enemy were not men for whom he felt himself answerable to the German people, but pawns in his unrestrained bid for power.

For this reason he had none of the personal relationships with the fighting troops which have at all times characterised the really great soldier. On the very rare occasions when he could be persuaded to visit a headquarters in the field, the journey from the aerodrome to headquarters was made at high speed, avoiding as far as possible any contact with the troops. His understanding of the fighting soldier, which he boasted was due to his front-line service in the 1914-1918 war, undoubtedly enabled him to transplant himself into the ordinary soldier's mentality. But the only practical use he made of this understanding was in propaganda for his ideas and in what he believed to be the inspiring Orders of the Day which he would issue at the beginning of a campaign or in the moment of crisis. This soulless man was incapable of any real spiritual contact with the soldiers whom the German people had placed in his charge.

There is no proof to the contrary in the legends and myths which were woven round his person and which

brought forth, for example, enthusiastic accounts on field postcards of Fuehrer visits to the front, *which in fact had never taken place*. The picture of a supreme military commander with no spiritual contact with his troops is in no way contradicted by the isolated occasions when he felt he should play the part of the father of his men. Such incidents, which were immediately seized upon by a brilliant propaganda service, merely served to prove that Hitler was a most accomplished actor, whose every gesture and word were calculated for effect. In the cool atmosphere of military decisions when there was no public present to be impressed, the soulless chill of this irresponsible gambler with men's lives came through often enough with devastating clarity.

Any senior military commander who ventured to remind him of his responsibility for his troops had merely to put up with being called soft, a weakling or even a coward.

It is a part of the function of the military leader—on the intellectual and spiritual plane—to inspire his executive commanders and staffs with confidence in his guiding hand. Hitler was completely incapable of this.

He may have had a gift for mass political leadership. He had none for the leadership of a military staff.

He substituted for it the brute force of official orders. This unrestrained revolutionary who himself knew no spiritual ties hated the professional officers for their ties to Christianity, to the ethics of their profession and to tradition. They were a necessary evil which, to his frequently expressed regret, he could not do without; not at least so long as the S.S. leaders, whose spirit was akin to his own, were too few to replace them.

As a result of Hitler's distrust of the Army leaders he more and more narrowed the scope of their functions. This process began with the transfer to Todt of the responsibility for building the West Wall, and ended in 1945 with the creation of military formations by local Party leaders and the incorporation of these men into the military defence system of Germany. In the course of it there came into being a large number of special organisations—'Agencies' or 'Commissions'<sup>1</sup>—each of which, following the direct instructions of the Fuehrer, cut across all unified military organisation and by introducing a divergence of effort reduced it to chaos.

Piece by piece the unity of the Army's Higher Command was whittled away and was finally destroyed.

Poland was removed from the Army's military administration. Norway became 'Hitler's Special Theatre of War' from which the Commander-in-Chief of the Army was completely excluded. The same happened in Africa. After the conclusion of military operations in the Balkans, they were wholly removed from the influence of the Army Command. In the campaign against Russia, the German troops operating in Finland were placed directly under Hitler's orders. Eventually, from the summer of 1941 onwards, the Army Commander-in-Chief in fact exercised his command only over the Eastern front, although, in the allocation of forces, it was quite impracticable to dissociate this front from the fronts elsewhere.

The decisive step on the road to ruin was the destruction in December 1941 of the Army High Command as the apex of the Army's organisation. By the dismissal of Field Marshal von Brauchitsch and the distribution

<sup>1</sup> "Bevollmaechtigte" oder "Beauftragte".

of his duties among people outside the Service, the Army was deliberately deprived of its head and rightful representative.

This 'divide and rule' policy of the Dictator, for ever obsessed with the maintenance of his own power, destroyed a well-organised system of military command which no true leader would ever have given up.

In place of this organisation which, for all its faults, had been capable of a high standard of military command, there was left at the end of the process a chaos of improvisation which has already become next to impossible for a historian to unravel. ||

## II TIMIDITY AND EXCESS

ONE often hears that Hitler proved his greatness as a war leader by his indisputable services in equipping the troops with the most modern war material, culminating in the 'Secret Weapons' which, in spite of everything, brought him within a hair's breadth of victory.

It is true that Hitler had a lively interest in, and indeed a marked understanding for technical construction of all kinds. He interested himself personally in the design of everything from weapons to engines, from ships to the technicalities of fortification. Nobody will deny that this interest was a powerful incentive in the 'Fuehrer State', that it was frequently of assistance to the fighting troops and contributed materially to their successes. But is that enough to make a great military leader? Elephants did not make a Hannibal, nor were the first tanks a source of greatness to the Allied Generals in the 1914-1918 War.

Weapons and engines are a common achievement of science, engineering and craftsmanship. The marks of a great leader are a quick understanding of their potentialities in war and an ability, far exceeding that of his contemporaries, to devise new uses for them. In Hitler one seeks these qualities in vain.

Neither the strategic use of tanks, which in the 1914-1918 War had only been used tactically, nor the mass use of aircraft as an independent strategic means to victory were ideas which originated from Hitler.

They derived from the constructive thinking which was done in military circles of the victor Powers and were then carefully studied and turned to account by the small German forces before Hitler had assumed command. It is true that he then took them up and with his interest and energy considerably advanced the technical development of the weapons themselves. But his personal intervention in their war-time use showed that he lacked the instinctive certainty of touch which marks the great General.

In the operational use of tanks he vacillated between timidity and excess. During the French Campaign, in which full effect was given for the first time to the modern conception of the tank's part in war, he repeatedly intervened to slow them down in their victorious drive. For instance, on the 17th and 18th May 1940, he personally gave orders to halt Kleist's Armoured Group in its pursuit of the leaderless retreating enemy, since it seemed to him that otherwise the slowly following infantry would be endangered. Again, on the 24th May 1940, against the opposition of the Army Commander-in-Chief, he actually withdrew the German tanks already standing behind the British front, and thus opened the way for the British Army's retreat to Dunkirk. The reason he gave at the time was the unsuitability of tanks for use in waterlogged country. In flat contradiction to this was his action in 1941, during the Russian campaign, when in spite of all warnings to the contrary he personally ordered tanks of the very same type into waterlogged marshlands, first round the Ilmensee, later at Schluselburg, and finally at Tikhvin.

He stubbornly ignored the warnings of experienced tank commanders that there are limits to what a tank

engine can do, when, in August 1941, he ordered the concentration of the bulk of the German tank formations for the battle of Kiev (a battle which was fought at his obstinate insistence) after they had already been through more than a month's fighting and advancing over trackless country. The battle was won, but when the same formations were called upon immediately afterwards to take part in the attack on Moscow, the overdriven engines took their revenge.

These are only a few examples, but they show that what was at work was not the lucid mentality of a great General but a stubborn will guided by dark intuition.

This is not to say that Hitler was never capable of the sort of thinking which marks the great General when he is seeking for new ideas either for the application of existing methods of warfare or for the creation of new and even more effective ones.

There were times when his mind was actively occupied with the thought that perhaps the armoured fighting vehicle had passed the peak of its power already in this war and that the growing effectiveness of anti-tank defences, both on the ground and from the air, might perhaps be on the point of ending its decisive role in land warfare.

But these were only occasional flights to a higher plane of thought. Hitler was and remained tied to the tasks of the moment. Sometimes they led him to take a personal part in tank construction or in the technical development of anti-tank weapons, in both of which fields he undoubtedly had something to his credit. At other times it pleased him, in his self-designated role as the Army's only real artilleryman, to defy the opposition of his professional advisers by ordering the construction of monster guns. These guns, even when manu-

factured in single numbers, required an enormous expenditure of material and labour which they never justified on the few occasions of their use.

The fact that Hitler's vision for major questions of strategy was clouded by his preoccupation with minor technical questions is also shown by the way in which he occupied himself with problems of fortification. He could spend half a day consulting together with engineer officers on the most suitable arrangement for loop-holes in fortified buildings, on the layout of pillbox entrances, or on the thickness of concrete walls and ceilings.

But for the well-founded doubts of the staff on the strategic value of long lines of fortification, he had no ear whatsoever. His delight in building was too strong.

After the West Wall, which may have had a certain value at the beginning of the war, mainly due to its psychological effect, but never because of its actual strategic importance, his dictatorial command brought into being the 'Atlantic Wall', a super-dimensional undertaking, the cost of which, in materials and labour seriously prejudiced the army fighting in the East. Yet the Atlantic Wall did not provide any real obstacle to the enemy invasion in 1944. This example more than most shows how far removed from the spontaneous creative genius of a great General was the mind of Hitler, shackled to outdated conceptions of static warfare and pre-occupied with his mechanical hobby-horses and his grandiose taste for mere immensity.

A word about the 'secret weapons'. Hitler was not their creator. They were produced by the combined efforts of German science and German engineering and he was very late in realising the military value of the work done in this field. Certainly when he did, he backed it with the whole force of his will, but at the

same time he pinned such extravagant hopes on its success that he blinded the German people and even many military experts to the true situation.

Experiments in rocket propulsion as the motive power for long-range projectiles were begun in 1937. They had the eager, although secret, support of the later Field Marshal von Brauchitsch. It was not until 1939 that von Brauchitsch first reported on the progress of their development to Hitler in his capacity of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. Instead of the interest which he expected, he met with a sharp rebuff. The fact that something new had been started without his participation angered Hitler, and he forbade any further work on it. Not until after the departure of Field Marshal von Brauchitsch did Hitler himself take up the idea and work on it was then pressed forward with all possible speed, being represented as the development of *his* weapon. Two decisive years had been lost and when the 'secret weapons' were eventually introduced in the form of the V1 and V2, the black shadow of the enemy command of the air already lay over their production and use.

The quality which the general public most closely associates with the idea of a great military leader is the capacity for superlative generalship. The man who initiates brilliant plans of campaign, who can adapt and carry through his ideas against the resourceful opposition of the enemy and thus lead his army through all the unavoidable vicissitudes of war to final victory—that is the man whom the people will acclaim a great soldier and leader.

Moreover, history will still acknowledge the greatness of a proved leader even if the fortunes of war

eventually desert him and he is perhaps brought to a tragic end.

So, in arriving at an unbiassed judgment of Hitler's military ability, its disastrous outcome must not necessarily be taken as conclusive.

As early as in 1938 Hitler used his autocratic power to make himself Supreme Military Commander of Germany, by stepping into Blomberg's shoes. That was a purely political act by which he thought to overcome the opposition which he knew existed in the Army. Whether he had already made up his mind, even at that time, to take the military command into his own hands in the event of war, nobody will ever be able to say for certain.

But, in any case, when Hitler the Politician demanded that preparations should be made against the possibility of a military solution of the Sudeten and, later, of the Polish question, Hitler the Military Leader was not slow in exercising the Supreme Command himself.

From that time onwards he never relinquished any of his powers of command; on the contrary he never ceased quite arbitrarily extending them still further.

Hitler knew full well that he lacked the equipment for solving problems of generalship. He made up for it by a sublime faith in the infallibility of his intelligence, which enabled him to look down on all forms of expert knowledge as though from a superior level, and by a conviction that as a result of his service in the First World War, he himself was possessed of abundant military experience. Many self-assured pronouncements of his bear witness to this.

It is undoubtedly true that workable solutions for major military problems are by no means a monopoly of the professional soldier. On the contrary, original

ideas came in both World Wars from non-military sources. Moltke even in his time said that the fundamentals of generalship 'did not go beyond the simplest premises of ordinary commonsense'.

Hitler was no exception to this rule. He would occasionally produce ideas which were thoroughly workable—even though his process of arriving at them was usually quite different from that of the expert. He certainly had 'bright ideas'. But between that capacity which, after all, is not uncommon, and the divine inspiration of the great leader, there lies a world of difference. From a great leader one expects not just occasional good ideas, but a superlative ability enabling him in any situation to think ahead purposefully and constructively and to foresee the multifarious consequences which may result from putting into effect the outcome of his thought.

In Hitler's character one can find none of the boldness and daring which should distinguish the true leader. Boldness does not consist of minimising risks and of dismissing the enemy as 'idiots', but of making a thorough and rational examination both of the risks and prospects of success and then arriving at a decision with that cheerful serenity which Schlieffen extolled as the signal virtue of the great General.

In his self-appointed position as Supreme Commander Hitler had the responsibility of making an accurate estimate of the fighting power of the German Armed Forces in war.

At the time of Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations, again at the time of the march into the Rhineland, and finally at a meeting in November 1937, it was made perfectly clear to Hitler by his professional advisers—the Commanders-in-Chief of the

three Services—that any armed conflict emanating from Germany must inevitably lead to another World War. In Germany's military and political situation that would mean a war on two fronts for which Germany's strength was not enough to carry her through.

This was also the purport of the Army General Staff memorandum of the summer of 1938 which led to Beck's departure.

Hitler met these warnings by flatly denying the possibility of intervention by Britain and France, and no argument, either political or military, could shift him from this opinion.

In 1936 and 1938 events proved him right; in 1939, wrong. This was a pure gamble which bears no resemblance to the boldness of a great military leader.

We find a similar story before the Russian campaign. On Hitler's orders the three Services—Army, Navy and Air Force—as was their duty, examined Germany's military prospects in the event of war. Their spokesmen reported their findings to Supreme Commander Hitler and gave him a warning—the same with Goering.

The way Hitler treated these warnings is shown by the attitude he adopted towards the arguments put forward by the Army High Command at a meeting on the 3rd February 1941. He knew well enough through his ubiquitous intelligence service what was being said in Army circles against the Russian adventure and was obviously prepared to meet it. He brushed aside arguments stressing the incalculable strength of Russian manpower with a statement that rapid and smashing successes at the outset of the campaign would be bound to bring down the whole structure of the Bolshevik régime, which, he said, was so hated by the Russian people, and that such reserves of Russian manpower as

might be left after the initial mobilisation would be of no consequence.

A reference to the material strength of the Russian Army, and in particular to the huge figure of over 10,000 tanks, brought forth a peroration from Hitler lasting over a quarter of an hour in which he detailed from memory the figures of Russian production for each year since the 1920's and declared that nobody with any spirit would allow himself to be impressed by such completely obsolete equipment.

To the statement that we had no reliable evidence on which to base an estimate of the Russian arms potential, he replied that he, as an unrivalled specialist in questions of armament, was a far better judge of such matters than any soldier. He then gave from memory what seemed an endless series of official Russian statistics covering imports, exports and the employment of skilled workers in the different industries during the previous decade. He ended with an assertion that not even he could have achieved anything useful faced with these miserable figures—let alone the Russians, who lacked any kind of technical ability. (A bad error of judgment!)

Hitler's attention was also drawn to the fact that an advance in the east to the line, Black Sea—Gulf of Finland, would create a front twice as long as that at the start of the campaign, and that the German forces were inadequate for that, let alone being faced later with the measureless Russian spaces beyond.

For this too he had an answer ready. The entire Russian Army facing us would have to be totally destroyed in the opening battles. Then nothing would remain to oppose us in the whole of Russia's vast territory and it would become merely a matter of an

'occupation', for which our forces would more than suffice.

This shows without any doubt why Hitler cannot be regarded as a great military leader. Such a man, with dynamic intellect, energy and bold daring, may go beyond what the average military mind sees as the limits of possible achievement, but he will never fail to recognise and heed the fact that ultimately such limits do exist. He will not, as did Hitler, base all his actions on wishful thinking rather than on what can be achieved.

The reason why the great soldier is such a rare phenomenon is not only because it demands of a man a supreme standard both of technical ability and of the highest human virtues such as strength of intellect and character, but also because the art of generalship requires other qualities seldom combined in any one person. It demands a delicate feeling for what is in the minds of others, which he can apply both to the enemy and to his own troops. It demands also an inflexible strength of will. It demands at one and the same time a winged imagination and an imperturbable level-headedness. It needs sometimes cool patience in awaiting the crucial moment; at another a restless impatience demanding ever more speed and action. At one moment the intellect must predominate, at another the will.

It would be wrong to say that Hitler was incapable of any feeling for what was in another person's mind. He had an almost wild-animal perception for anything which ran counter to himself or which threatened his position. But this faculty did not function in an objective way; it was purely egocentric. It was used for his self-preservation and was an instrument of the exaggerated suspicion of which he himself boasted. It had nothing

in common with the sensitive faculty of the great soldier.

The delicate interplay between yielding pliancy and iron determination which is the essence of the art of generalship was impossible to this man, who could be termed the very incarnation of brute will. He had no conception of the idea of patience. He could never sit back with the confident calm of the great General and allow a developing situation to come to fruition. (Think, for example, of the characteristic scene when Moltke, at the climax of the battle of Koniggratz, selected with unruffled calm an undamaged cigar out of the case which was offered to him.) In momentary crises which he, but not the Army Command, had failed to foresee, he would be seized by a fever of impatience, issuing orders right and left on absurd details and sending them off direct to subordinate headquarters, thus completely by-passing the responsible commanders. This lack of patience is a typical failing of the inexperienced beginner and is the kind of fault which, in a minor member of an organisation, will tend to be counterbalanced by the action of the whole. But when it happens in the highest place, where no superior exists to correct mistakes, and when the advice and protests of subordinates are brusquely rejected, there is no such compensation. Even there it is a sign of the inexperienced beginner and of lack of self-confidence.

The self-confidence of the great General which enables him to give freedom of action to his subordinates within the framework of a well-considered broad assignment—a secret of Moltke's leadership—was unknown to Hitler. The man who had made his word into law by the exercise of naked power, completely lacked

the sureness of the master-craftsman in his handling of military problems.

He saw only details and not the grand pattern of the operation. His previous war experience led him to overvalue the former and he lacked the standards by which to judge the latter. The man, to whom the artistry of a modern General Staff map was a complete mystery, believed that he was living up to his role of a great military leader by interfering from his Headquarters, hundreds of miles behind the Eastern Front, in the movement of single Divisions, and by deciding tactical details which could only be judged aright by the commander on the spot.

*Négligez pas les détails!* This could well be said by a man who had already shown himself a master of the art of grand strategy. But concentration on details alone, to the exclusion of all else, cannot earn for a man the mantle of greatness.

It seems to be widely held that one quality of a great General was possessed by Hitler—the power of decision. In fact that was just what he lacked when he had to deal with military questions of major importance. Perhaps this was partly due to the way decisions are reached at high military headquarters. They precede execution by a considerable time—several days perhaps, often weeks and sometimes months. They are taken, not on the strength of the present situation but on the basis of its expected development, a basis which can only be provided by the clarity and foresight of the great General.

Hitler's military decisions, and indeed most of his political decisions, reflected his piratical instincts. If a good opportunity presented itself for a cheap success then he was as quick to act as he was unrestrained. But

it was only with the greatest reluctance that he would dare to take the plunge into a less tangible future.

Uncertain and hesitant, he would put off from day to day, and with empty excuses, the decisions which his expert advisers urged him to take. Many mistakes of command, for which the troops in the field had to suffer, were caused by Hitler's decision coming too late. Still worse, on numerous occasions and without any good military reason he countermanded decisions, hours, sometimes days, after they had been issued. The army in the field suffered severely from this, especially in the later war years, and was gradually forced to the unsatisfactory expedient of looking to its own interests.

Hitler's position as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces required him to confine his military activities to the field of strategy. In the language of the expert one understands by this word 'strategy' the military policies and decisions which arise not from military considerations alone, but from the interdependence of the military and the political, economic and intellectual direction of the nation's affairs. It is the business of the nation's military leader to represent the legitimate interests of the military at this strategic level.

History shows that these interests frequently conflict with political interests. The dispute between Moltke and Bismarck, which took place in 1871 outside Paris, was a characteristic example of this. Similar were the differences of opinion between the Allies in 1943 as to whether an offensive should be opened in the West or in the Balkans. A clear division of responsibilities usually eases this conflict of opinions. In Hitler the responsibilities for both political and military were combined. He blurred the boundaries between them just as it suited him and, when he found himself without any

further arguments to counter those of the military experts, he escaped into the realm of politics which he used to justify decisions based on his 'intuition'.

To have his strategic decisions put into effect, the Supreme Commander issues his orders to the military authorities who have been appointed to carry them out. In the German hierarchy these were the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Their function in the overall pattern of command is called, in German military language, 'Operations'. 'Tactics' begin where they become concerned with the details of the battle itself.

### III WAR

A SUBSEQUENT examination of the events of 1939 shows how the Politician Hitler himself instigated and fomented the Polish crisis so as to bring it to the settlement by force which, in spite of all warnings from the military, had obviously been in his mind from the beginning.

Although constantly reminded of the limits of Germany's military capacity, he overstepped them, promising that unlike 'the incompetent men of 1914' he would not permit the development of a war on two fronts.

In the Polish campaign, Hitler's achievements were limited to issuing the strategic order to the responsible operational headquarters, namely the Army High Command. This order required the defeat of the Polish Armed Forces and stated that the geographical envelopment of Polish territory by Silesia in the south and East Prussia in the north should be exploited for this purpose. The order was simple and clear. It could be fulfilled with the German forces available. But it was rather too self-evident to be regarded as any particular achievement of a great military leader.

After the success of the initial engagements, a strategic decision had to be taken regarding Warsaw. The city had already been surrounded and it was a question whether it should be forced into capitulation by hunger, or whether it should be overpowered by military force, with all the destruction which that would entail. The responsible operational commander—the Commander-

in-Chief of the Army—was in favour of a long siege on the grounds not only that it would avoid unnecessary loss of life, but that it would also permit the transfer of the bulk of the heavy artillery to the West to strengthen our defences there against the threatened attack. Hitler decided in favour of force, the reason being, as was subsequently revealed, political. Poland's capital city had to be taken before the Russians, with whom a secret agreement existed, could get within reach. This reason was not disclosed to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.

When the Russians did suddenly appear in Poland, an occurrence which no one but Hitler could have anticipated, he sacrificed the interests of the troops in his charge and the lives of many German men to the political game, by brutally pulling them back while still fighting in the bloody closing actions of the campaign.

As it happened, the war on two fronts did not materialise during the campaign in Poland. In the West, the armies stood facing each other with arms grounded—*drôle de guerre* (comic war, the French called it).

It is true that by their declaration of war, Britain and France had themselves called for a decision by arms, but they appeared to await a German move. Should our forces now take the initiative?

Hitler was faced with a typical strategic decision, in which both military and very serious political factors had to be taken into account. The solution which the General Staff proposed was characteristic of the German Army. After the release of the strong German forces in Poland, it had decided in favour of the defensive in the West. For the Western Powers a frontal attack on

the strong positions of the West Wall and of the Upper Rhine had, with the conclusion of the German victory in Poland, lost all chance of success. If they wanted to bring about the decision by arms for which they themselves had called, they would have to launch an attack over neutral territory against the unprotected part of the German frontier. That would provide the Germans with an opportunity of decisively defeating their attacking forces by an operational countermove away from the centres of French power and the safety of the coast.

Only a command which is as certain of its troops as it is of its skill can afford to adopt a scheme such as this, which hands all initiative to the enemy. It met with no understanding in our Dictator, who in military questions was completely uncertain of his ground.

The bitter dispute which ensued was settled by a firm order from Hitler to make preparations for an early German attack with its principal thrust through the Belgian provinces of Limburg and Brabant. It was an unimaginative replica of the Schlieffen plan, the weaknesses of which had been shown by the First World War.

The Army High Command opposed this plan and arranged to shift the centre of operations into the Ardennes as soon as possible after they had begun so as to accord with its own ideas. But no longer had Hitler any confidence in his own plan. In his uncertainty he gave his ear to a whisper which reached him from a certain front-line Headquarters with which he had personal relations, to the effect—correct, as it happened—that a weak point existed in the French frontier defences north of Charleville. The Headquarters in question pressed him to make use of this weak point for an attack to the south with the aim of enveloping the Maginot line and forestalling an attack which threat-

ened from that direction. Of this plan, which incidentally had been rejected by the Army Command as being of only local importance, only one thing stuck in Hitler's mind: the phrase 'a weak point'. During a heated argument with the Army Command over the flaws in his original plan of attack, he himself came forward with the idea of making use of this 'weak point' for an attack towards the west. The idea was not new. It had been considered by the Army High Command in connection with an operational countermove against an enemy advance into Belgium, but, together with the whole of that plan which had left the initiative to the enemy, it had been turned down at the time by Hitler. Consequently, his idea was promptly adopted by the Army High Command and led as a result to the well-known operation of the first French campaign which Churchill called the 'sweep of a sharp scythe'. It was a typical Hitlerian idea; one can even say a good one. ||

But how little capable he was of really thinking out its full military implications was shown later by his interventions in the course of the operation.

This idea of seeking success with a strong left wing and of driving it through to the sea by the use of massed tanks brought with it certain implications; it meant, for example, that the southern flank of this thrust would be increasingly exposed to danger the further it progressed to the west and that it would consequently be necessary to weaken the northern wing of the operation through Limburg and Brabant (hitherto regarded as decisive) or even, if the situation demanded it, to hold it up altogether.

None of this was ever grasped by Hitler. Time and again he created difficulties for the operational Com-

mander by holding back the decisive southern thrust and senselessly driving forward the secondary attack in the north. Finally, at Dunkirk, he prevented the complete destruction of the British Army by withdrawing the German tanks which were already at their rear.

The reason for this incomprehensible interference in the province of the Army High Command was revealed in 1946 for the first time by the mutually corroborative statements of two senior Air Force officers. The encirclement of the French and British Forces, which was the aim of the whole operation, had been on the point of being achieved, when Goering warned Hitler against leaving such a success to the Generals, suggesting that if he did they might win a prestige with the German people which would threaten his own position. Goering offered the services of his Air Force to complete the destruction of the almost encircled enemy, without any help from the Army.

Hitler, always suspicious of the Army leaders, accepted the suggestion and issued orders over the head of the Army Commander-in-Chief for the withdrawal of the German tanks. He then handed over the final stage of this decisive battle to the Air Force, who of course could do no more than partially complete it and after 48 hours needed further help from the Army. Thus, the action of this 'great military leader' enabled Britain to rescue her troops and retain the capacity for further opposition.

When the French campaign was over, Goering thought the time had come to acclaim Hitler publicly as 'Feldherr'—the nation's War Lord. He gave it out that Hitler had decided all details of the 'operations plan' himself and had carried in his head the position of every single division. This was in fact only true in so

far as Hitler, as the Supreme Commander, had had presented to him daily a situation map showing the position of every formation and had known the aim of the operation and the orders which the Army had received. He had never known the 'operations plan'; that was a matter for the Army Commander. By this term 'operations plan' one understands that total of planning which expresses itself in the grouping of forces and in the orders given to the army groups and armies. It embodies the outcome of all the thought which has been given to the enemy and to his likely intentions, to one's own chances of countering them, to when and where crises may be expected, and the means whereby they may be forestalled or overcome. The 'operations plan' is a work of art, which like any other work of art is a reflection of its creator's character. Even when put in writing it leaves an infinite amount unsaid. The expert can gain his best insight into the general background of thought on which an 'operations plan' has been based by a glance at the disposition of the reserves. Their strength, their distribution and movements will show him more of the advance planning which has been put into the operation than a picture of the front at any one moment. It is characteristic of Hitler's lack of strategic understanding that he never showed the slightest interest in the disposition and movement of the reserves, although minor occurrences at the front could occupy him for hours.

## NORWAY TO AFRICA

WHILE military preparations for the French campaign were still in progress, Hitler was faced with a grave strategic question—Norway. We know to-day, that Britain was faced with the same question at the same time and that she decided to solve it—in the military field—in a similar way, although with subtler political methods. We also know that in the event she was forestalled by Hitler.

In any assessment of Hitler's strategic achievements, the Norwegian affair as a whole must be booked to the credit side. It may be said that success hung by a thread and was only made possible by the military weaknesses of the enemy. It may be said that the naval losses were disproportionately large, and that they appreciably reduced the future effectiveness of that arm of service. But the war historian will concede to Hitler that, at least from the military point of view, he chose the right moment for the initiative and succeeded in frustrating the enemy's intentions.

But what is not generally known is that Hitler, who directed the operations in Norway personally and without any part being played by the Army High Command—thereby creating for the first time the idea of 'Supreme Commander's Theatre of War'—was completely at a loss at the appearance of the first major crisis at Narvik, and but for the energetic intervention of his senior military adviser in Supreme Headquarters would have called off the whole operation. This proves that Hitler

was not a great General, but a gambler; otherwise he would have foreseen the crisis in his planning and would have made quite sure that he kept in his hands the means of overcoming it.

The French campaign had brought military victory in the West, but no decision. Britain remained an adversary not only on the sea and in the air, but with support from America would without fail become in due course once again effective on land. The Western Front had been pushed up to the Atlantic, but it remained none the less a front.

In the meantime an Eastern Front had come into being, on which weak German forces—barely adequate for customs protection—stood faced with a many times superior and continually growing levy of fully effective Russian troops. Distrust of our Eastern neighbours, which was only superficially concealed by the Pact of Friendship, and which before and during the campaign in France may well have been the mainspring of Hitler's nervous impatience, was developing into a serious anxiety as a result of Russian behaviour in the Baltic States, on the demarcation line and in Bessarabia. The nightmare of the Second Front, which Hitler had boasted to be able to avoid, loomed menacingly ahead.

What proposals should Hitler the Military Leader now make to Hitler the Politician, who had brought him into this situation. To a military leader familiar with the character of his enemy it must have been perfectly clear in 1940 that, in face of the limited numbers of the Air Force and the complete inadequacy of the means for making war at sea, the Army's superiority could not suffice to force a determined Britain to sue for peace—not even if ground forces were to succeed in getting a foothold on British soil.

There remained only the sober conclusion that it was a situation which could not be satisfactorily solved by military means. It was up to the Politician to solve it, and he could have solved it—by joining with the West against the East or with the East against the West.

Either of these solutions would have demanded a high political price, which was more than this Dictator, in his craze for power, was prepared to pay. The Politician Hitler called for a solution by military means; Supreme Commander Hitler took on the task. Hence his order to the Navy, Air Force and Army to prepare for a landing on British soil. Hence also his instructions to the Navy for operations against the Canary and Cape Verde islands, and to the Army for the capture of Gibraltar, while all the time his thoughts were occupied with plans for crushing Russia by force of arms.

There is no point in making a critical estimate of the plans for operations against the British Empire, plans which were partially completed even as far as settling the date for the attack. They came to nothing. But as a typical example of Hitler's mentality it should perhaps be mentioned that he thought he could carry through the attack on Gibraltar as a 'Blitzkrieg'. To bring up the necessary minimum of troops and the equipment essential for an assault on a fortress would have required two months and would have necessitated military movements right across a country kept under close observation by the British Intelligence Service. Even if Hitler had managed to create the political conditions necessary for such an operation, Britain would have had ample time, from the moment German troops set foot in Spain, to take counter-measures both from Gibraltar and from Portugal. The result would have been a struggle on Spanish soil which would have consumed both time

and strength—certainly no way of getting free from the danger of a war on two fronts. What governed Hitler was wishful thinking, not the great General's sure instinct for what was possible.

History will come to the same conclusion on the launching of the German Air Force against Britain before the preparations for the landing operation, known as 'Sea Lion', had been completed.

In the Battle of Britain over-estimation of our own strength and under-estimation of our enemy's caused losses to the German Air Force from which it never completely recovered throughout the rest of the war.

Meanwhile Italy had entered the war as an Ally on Germany's side. Hitler had been urgently warned of the military burden which this alliance could not fail to create. The Politician believed that he could ignore the warning of his military advisers. During the campaign in France, he had revelled in an idea for the 'surprise' introduction of 40 Italian divisions on the Upper Rhine front. These divisions had in fact never been available. It would have taken three months to transport them to the front and they could not have been effective as a surprise. It is typical of Hitler's mentality that he hoped to strengthen Mussolini's position by allowing him to participate in the splendour of his own military fame. Concern over Mussolini's position, which he felt had been endangered by his 'deals with Crown and with Church', inclined Hitler to give way to the Duce in military matters, at times to the point of weakness.

When in the summer of 1940 the Italian failure in North Africa had endangered the Duce's prestige, Hitler was immediately ready to send German troops to his help. That was strategically justified.

It was essential to delay for as long as possible the

moment when Britain would have access to the whole of the North Coast of Africa as a springboard for an attack on Italy or the Balkans. Seen strategically, it was a battle for time and the Army High Command never represented it to Hitler as anything else. In North Africa a decisive victory over Britain was impossible. She dominated the German supply lines across the Mediterranean and Germany had no chance of disputing her domination. It was beyond the power both of the Italian Navy and of the few German 'U' boats which could reach the Mediterranean only at a cost of 50% losses. For supply by air there was a shortage of transport aircraft, of fuel and, as a result of the heavy losses of the Air Force over England, of adequate fighter planes. Britain on the other hand could bring up troops and supplies through the Red Sea at will and right from the very beginning, therefore, it was only a matter of time before Britain's superiority would become overwhelming. The German policy could only be to delay this moment as long as possible by exercising the maximum possible economy in the expenditure of her resources.

It was characteristic of Hitler's strategic thinking that under the influence of Rommel's successes he completely lost sight of this policy, with which he had at first been in full agreement. He was soon indulging in extravagant visions of a conquest of Egypt, of a bid for the Suez Canal, and later even of a junction with the Japanese through the Red Sea. Caution was urged by the Army Commander-in-Chief, but he was pushed out of the picture and North Africa declared a 'Supreme Commander's Theatre of War'. Our Italian Allies were deceived by extravagant promises and by lying exaggeration of the German war potential.

Hitler was in no way to blame for Mussolini's adventure in Greece. But when the Italian Army very soon ran into difficulties in Albania, Hitler was prepared to send troops from Germany to its aid. The Army Commander-in-Chief was able to foil this operationally hopeless plan, but was unable to stop Hitler from promising Mussolini to come to his help from the Balkans. At that juncture the weak German forces in Bulgaria, which had only been intended for Greece, had just been given orders to move to the extent of a considerable part into Yugoslavia, which in the meantime had joined with the enemy, while the remainder was to occupy Greece and drive out the British who had landed there. Just then Hitler gave orders for a strong German force to be sent by way of Skoplie in southern Serbia to join forces with the hard-pressed Italians in northern Albania.

Such an extraordinary move would have prejudiced the chances of an early success in Greece, although a quick German conquest in northern Greece was the most effective way of helping the Italians. Hitler, however, stuck fast to his plan; his political will triumphed over the military objections, the validity of which he was unable to appreciate. No harm resulted, for the Army High Command circumvented his order and success proved them right.

V  
ORDER BARBAROSSA

WHILE it became steadily plainer that, in spite of all the German fancy plans, it was not going to be possible to enforce peace on the enemy in the West by military action, the horizon in the East grew steadily darker. Russia was moving with ever-growing strength into the Baltic States, which had been conceded as her sphere of interest; on the Russo-German demarcation line there stood over a million Russian soldiers in full battle order with tanks and aircraft opposite a few German security formations sparsely stretched over wide sectors of the line; in the South-East, Russia had occupied Rumanian territory in Bessarabia and Bukovina. Moreover, she was showing herself unresponsive to Hitler's political manoeuvres. The last attempt to gain her as a partner in the division of the world according to Hitler's plans had foundered at a two-day meeting with Molotov in the middle of November 1940. Hitler the Politician had come to the end of his devices.

In December 1940 he issued his order to the three Services—the 'Barbarossa' Order—to make military preparations for an attack on Russia against the possibility of Russo-German relations undergoing a fundamental change. It was a preparatory measure, no decision had then been taken. One must admit the politician's right to delay taking the final decision until the last moment. Precisely when Hitler did take it, can probably no longer be established. Statements, speeches and orders with which he prepared the machine, both

materially and psychologically, in case it should be required, cannot be regarded as meaning anything with this master of duplicity. It can be assumed, however, that it was not taken until after the quick successes of the Balkan campaign, in the course of which Russia's hostility towards Hitler had been unmistakably revealed.

The decision for the attack on Russia came anything but easily to Hitler. His mind was occupied with the warnings of his military advisers; the shadow of Napoleon, with whom he liked to hear himself compared, lay across the mysterious spaces of that country. On the other hand he had a firm and not unfounded conviction that Russia was arming for an attack on Germany. To-day we know from good sources that he was right. Russia would naturally choose a moment for the attack when Germany was in a position least favourable to herself—in other words when the West was once again ready for action. The war on two fronts, which the Army General Staff memorandum had forecast as long ago as 1938, would then be a fact.

When the politician can see no further chance of smoothing over a threatening clash by diplomatic methods, one cannot blame the nation's military leader if he wishes to protect his country against enemy violation by moving to the attack himself—provided of course that the politician can give him the chance of so doing without transgressing the principles and forms of international law. Attack, by shifting the action into enemy country, offers him the chance of safeguarding the territory in his charge from enemy assault.

But the military leader must see to it that the politician is left in no doubt as to the limits of what he can achieve by military action. These limits must determine the war aim of the politician.

At the beginning of 1941, the German forces, which after adequate provision had been made for holding forces on the other fronts could have been made available for the East, would have been just about sufficient to inflict a decisive defeat on the Russian levies facing them. As these in fact represented the bulk of the Russian forces in Europe this would have eliminated any chance of further military action by Russia for a long time to come. They would have sufficed to win a strategic foreground in front of the German and Rumanian frontiers by the occupation of sizeable parts of the Ukraine, of White Russia and of the Baltic States—thereby also providing a bargaining counter for peace negotiations.

Whether as a result of what he was told by the Commanders-in-Chief of the three Services, Hitler brought himself to realise these limits in a responsible manner, was impossible to tell with this enigmatic man. He had a masterly way of avoiding the discussion of topics irksome to him. What is certain though is that his unbridled will refused to take them into account.

The aims which Hitler the Politician saw before him at the outset of the move against Russia were the final elimination of Russia as a European power and the annexation of large parts of her territory as settlements for his *Volk ohne Raum*—‘People without breathing space’. Accordingly Hitler the Military Leader set himself the task of annihilating Russia’s military power and resources, and of conquering her territory up to the general line of the Caspian Sea–White Sea.

Hitler had never made known his intentions in these clear terms to the men who were charged with the command of the operation—the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force. In accordance with

his instruction that no headquarters should know more of the total objects of the campaign than was necessary to carry out the tasks immediately in hand—later posted up in all offices as the ‘Fuehrer’s standing orders’—he discussed only the first objectives with the Army Commander-in-Chief. Over these there existed no basic disagreement. They had to be set wide enough both to provide the space necessary for the destruction of the Russian forces and to eliminate the threat of the Russian Air Force to German territory.

So the first objectives had to be on the lower Dnieper, in the plateau east of Smolensk and in the region of Leningrad for the Southern, Central and Northern Army Groups respectively. What further objectives could be fixed would depend upon the result of the first great battles. One thing however was plain: Moscow remained of supreme importance, since in addition to being the focal point of the Russian communications network, it was also one of her European armament centres, round which would no doubt be concentrated considerable parts of the new armies which she could be expected to raise.

A remark by the Army Commander-in-Chief to this effect evoked a strangely violent reaction from Hitler which cast a glaring light on his unspoken thoughts. ‘Only completely ossified brains, absorbed in the ideas of past centuries’, he said angrily, ‘could see any worthwhile objective in taking the capital.’ His interest lay in Leningrad and Stalingrad, the breeding grounds of Bolshevism. Destroy these two cities by a wide sweep of powerful army groups in both the North and South and Bolshevism would be dead—that being what mattered.

The Army Commander-in-Chief argued that those

were the aims of a politician; but in his capacity as Supreme Military Commander Hitler had given the Army the task of destroying the Russian forces, and these were standing astride the historic military road Bialystok-Moscow. At this point Hitler promptly directed the discussion into other channels. But his 'strategic' ideas remained active in his mind.

Hitler's sharp ears had not missed the warning of his military advisers. For him there was only one entirely satisfactory outcome—the earliest possible elimination of Russia from Europe. He refused to acknowledge that there were any limits to what could be achieved by military action. These 'limits' were nothing more than an obsession in the minds of those spineless academic specialists. These people had always raised objections, but his genius had always proved right. This time too his will would be triumphant.

Superior to military considerations of time and space, he promised his Gauleiters that in six weeks he would stand victorious in Leningrad and that in eight weeks the Russians would sue for peace. His Propaganda Minister promised the German people that the troops on the Eastern Front would celebrate Christmas at home.

When the Army Commander-in-Chief asked for immediate preparations to be made for the provision of special winter clothing, he received a curt refusal with the remark that by the beginning of winter the fighting would long since have been over.

For the German troops who would still have to remain in the East as an occupation force, the Army's normal winter equipment would suffice, which of course would be available.

But even so, this self-hypnotism could not relieve Hitler's inner uncertainty. At the beginning of the opera-

tions in the East, which had been delayed some eight weeks by the unexpected interlude of the Yugoslavian campaign and by the enforced extension of the objectives in Greece, Hitler was obviously worried about the lateness of the season. What had been comparatively infrequent in previous campaigns now became a daily occurrence. He interfered in the detailed conduct of operations.

This 'great military leader' had not perceived how different the conditions were in the vast spaces of the East compared with those of former campaigns. In the close warfare and limited areas of the French campaign, for example, the control which the Army High Command had been able to exercise over the fighting formations had been so rigid in the early stages of the campaign that in the end it had been possible for the various threads of the operation—which from the beginning had followed a fixed plan—to converge and meet in the final great battle of Flanders. In the East, on the other hand, the army groups, separated by vast and almost trackless marshlands, became of necessity independent operational commands, to which the Army High Command did nothing more than assign the tasks and allot the means.

If therefore the Army Commander-in-Chief, as the responsible operational commander, had to limit himself to exercising a loose control over his army groups, how much less should the Supreme Commander, whose function was strategy, have interfered in operational—let alone tactical—details. It is true that it was frequently possible to protect the troops from these manifestations of Hitler's generalship, but they did at times have a very disturbing effect and provided many an opportunity for the enemy to escape with at least a part

of his forces from the pincers which had been intended for him.

When the Central Army Group had reached its first objectives and a pause had become necessary for closing up and for the organisation of supplies, the Northern Army Group was still engaged in closing up east and south of Pleskow. A Russian counter-attack against this Army Group gave Hitler occasion to put forward the ideas which had already been formulating in his mind at the time of the discussions over the first objectives. He wanted the Central Army Group reduced to a weak holding force and the bulk of its troops diverted to the north so as to hasten the capture of Leningrad.

It was an absurd idea to think of wheeling round a million or so men and countless vehicles in almost trackless country—just as though they were a battalion on the parade ground. It was an idea which did not derive from Hitler's military thinking, but from his political fanaticism which had set itself on the destruction of Leningrad. The Supreme Commander Hitler subordinated himself without question to the fanatical Politician.

When the Northern Army Group, without any reinforcement from the centre, had approached Leningrad so closely that it was ready to move forward to its capture, it was Hitler himself who intervened and forbade the attack. Now he was suddenly disposed to content himself with surrounding the city. He had been unable to come to any conclusion as to what to do with its million inhabitants, who could neither be disposed of nor fed.

Although Hitler had had to give up the idea of diverting strong forces from the centre to the north, the incident had been instrumental in starting discussions between him and the Army High Command on the

further conduct of the campaign. A suggestion that the Army, after being halted along a line drawn roughly through the first objectives, should go over to a strategic defence, met with a flat rejection.

A resumption of the offensive along the whole front was impossible owing to lack of numbers. The disproportion between the length of the front and the number of formations available, which long before—during the discussions preliminary to the Eastern campaign—had been in vain pointed out to Hitler, had begun to make itself felt. The only solution was to continue the offensive, if continued it must be, in the one direction which promised a decisive success. That direction, in the opinion of the Army High Command, was towards Moscow.

At this time the Central Army Group still had in front of it, in the district between Smolensk and Moscow, a substantial part of the first Russian levies under Timoschenko. These, it is true, had expended much of their strength in useless frontal counter-attacks, but they had shown a clear initiative in command and an unbroken readiness to fight. Between Smolensk and Moscow reserve positions were being feverishly constructed, which proved the sensitivity of the Russians to attacks in that direction. It was known that far to the rear new forces were being raised on a very extensive scale, a considerable part within reach of Moscow, west of the Volga. There was therefore no doubt whatever that the main weight of the Russian forces lay before the Central Army Group.

In the Ukraine, the Southern Army Group, to which had been added a weak contingent of Hungarians and several Rumanian Divisions, was engaged in what was becoming a steady advance towards the lower Dnieper. The opposing Russian forces under Budenny lost

steadily in fighting power and spirit. The only place where they were putting up a tenacious resistance was in the east of the Pripet marshes and to the north of Kiev, where they were helped by the character of the country. There were signs that they had begun to evacuate the country up to the Donetz, and partially even further to the east.

It seemed to the Army High Command that its next and most important step in fulfilment of its task of destroying the enemy's military resources was to concentrate all the forces it could lay its hands on at the centre of the Eastern Front and to use them to defeat Timoschenko's Central Group; then to push on to Moscow, take possession of this nerve centre of resistance and disperse the enemy's new armies. In view of the lateness of the season, the attack would have to be launched at the earliest possible moment. Its outcome would inevitably decide the fate of the Russian forces still holding out in front of the Northern and Southern Army Groups. After the failure of all verbal approaches the Army Commander-in-Chief put before Hitler a written memorandum recommending this plan. The effect was explosive.

In a reply which he had written himself and which was bursting with personal spite, Hitler declared that only a mind set in the mould of outworn theories could fail to notice that the slowness of the Southern Army Group compared with the Centre had created a breach in the front which virtually invited a devastating attack against Budenny's forces.

At this point, it would be possible to inflict crippling damage on the enemy and to open the way for a penetration by the German Army into the industrial area of the Eastern Ukraine, which was of such vital import-

ance to the Russians. Hence the strongest forces possible were to be assembled out of the Central and Southern Army Groups for a battle of encirclement east of the Dnieper.

This memorandum was followed by an official order to the same effect from Supreme Command Headquarters. It marked the final turning point of the Eastern campaign. Hitler's decision forced the Army Command to abandon the clear line which it had hitherto followed of aiming at the central point of Russian power, and to take on in its place an operation of minor importance which at best could do no more than hasten the collapse of an already yielding secondary front. This success, however, would have to be bought at the cost of irreplaceable time and strength.

The aim of inflicting a decisive defeat upon the Russian forces was thus made to give pride of place to an attempt to win control of a valuable industrial region and to an advance in the direction of the Russian oil fields! It was victory for the mysterious urge which from the beginning had been driving Hitler on towards Stalingrad.

After the 'Battle of Kiev' had been fought with reckless disregard for the demands which it made on the already overdriven engines, Hitler gave orders for an attack in the direction of Moscow. For this, of course, strong forces had first to be brought up from the Ukraine. But now it was too late—the engines were all but finished. After a successful attack at Viazma all movement was hampered by the autumn mud, and the winter—unusually early and unusually severe—entered the fray as a powerful ally of the Russians before the objective of the operation had been reached.

Before the effects of the winter had begun to make themselves felt, Hitler, wildly overrating 'his victory' at Kiev, had announced to the world through his Press chief that the Russians had been finally defeated. He had also given orders to the Army to disband numerous divisions and to discontinue the production of munitions.

The inevitable happened. The effect of the strategically wrong decision for the battle of Kiev, the excessive demands on the men, who had given trustingly of their last strength, the precise and powerful counter-attack of the Russians, pronounced 'dead' by Hitler, all these together with a winter of unusual severity, even by Russian standards, combined to bring about a series of grievous military reverses. This was more than the Army Commander-in-Chief was able to stand, for his health had been failing for some time and, dangerously ill, he asked to be relieved of his office.

Prompted by Hitler, Goebbels' 'whisper' propaganda pushed off the responsibility for the Army's reverses and for its lack of winter equipment on to this man, the man who had exhausted all his strength in fighting for his troops against Hitler.

'The Fuehrer can make no mistakes', Keitel had said. Hence, if there had been reverses, the mistakes must have been made by others—and this of course included the business of the winter clothing.

But war diaries show that this question of winter clothing, which had already been turned down once by Hitler even before the beginning of the war, had been re-opened by the Army Commander-in-Chief as early as July 1941 and that at the appropriate time he had ordered the inclusion in supply movements of all available army stocks of normal winter clothing. They show,

moreover, that in August he had laid before Hitler a proposal which had been made by the General Staff for a collection at home of warm winter sports clothing and had added the request that this collection, which was largely a matter for the civil authorities, should be put in hand as early as possible.

Immediate action on this would have given the lie to Hitler's promises that the German troops in the East would be home for Christmas. So, in spite of repeated reminders, the scheme remained lying in Hitler's desk until it was too late and until the locomotives and vehicles which were to bring up the winter clothing had been put out of action by temperatures of more than 40 degrees below zero.

In place of the retiring Commander-in-Chief, Hitler himself took over command of the German Army. One might perhaps suppose that he had been moved to step into the breach by serious anxiety over conditions at the front and by a deep feeling of responsibility for the German troops—beset both by the superiority of the enemy and by the merciless cold.

Any such ideas will very soon be dispelled by the words which he used in a private conversation with the Chief of the General Staff on the 19th December 1941, the day on which he took over command.

'This little affair of operational command is something that anybody can do. The Commander-in-Chief's job is to train the army in the National Socialist idea and I know of no General who could do that as I want it done. For that reason I've decided to take over command of the Army myself.'

So he himself would take over 'this little affair of operational command' and the General Staff of the Army High Command—which would now be directly

subordinate to him—would give him the same support as it had given the former Commander-in-Chief. All other duties of the Commander-in-Chief would be taken over by Keitel, who would carry them out according to Hitler's ideas.

This decision had a fatal similarity with that of the 4th February 1938, the day on which Hitler installed himself in place of Blomberg.

Then he had brought about the downfall of the head of the whole of the armed forces in which he had detected signs of opposition; now it was the turn of the head of the Army, who had set against Hitler's extravagant and fantastic ideas the sober mentality of the responsible soldier. It spelt the end of the Army High Command as a cohesive body unanimously representing the interests of the Army.

With his assumption of command over the Army, Hitler left the sphere of strategy for that of operations. He had often enough and without any compunction encroached in this sphere in the past, particularly during the Russian campaign and usually to its detriment. With deep anxiety the Army leaders awaited this development. Their attempts to resist the absurdities of Hitler's generalship for the sake of the German troops were to remain in the long run without success.

When Hitler took over command of the Army the situation was anything but pleasant. The German armies on the Eastern Front and especially in the centre, stood under the pressure of a Russian counter-attack by immense bodies of men driving forward with great momentum from the direction of Moscow. Our men were suffering unspeakably from the barbaric cold and their mobility decreased daily; vehicles, often even weapons, failed to function. Under the impact of the

unusually hard frosts, the difficulties of the railways were growing into a dangerous transport crisis.

It was essential that the commanders in the field should be given clear long-term orders to provide them with a basis for independent action within the framework of a unified plan. A proposal for a planned withdrawal over a few days' march to a line more suitable for defence was contested by Hitler with fanatical fury and he ordered the Army to 'fight to the last man' where it stood—even where its positions were tactically impossible to hold.

This order shows the quality of Hitler's leadership; it can be confirmed a thousandfold by reference to the documents now to be found in foreign archives.

Through his mania for carrying things to excess he turned a perfectly workable principle into a serious blunder. Under normal conditions, one overcomes an operational crisis, such as here existed, by operational withdrawal—thus introducing a new operation. Operation is movement. But the Army's mobility had been seriously diminished. Consequently no operational solution on the grand scale was possible. But its mobility was still sufficient to parry tactical crises.

Even this was denied the commanders in the field by Hitler's dictatorial order. In consequence there were heavy losses in men and material which could, without the slightest doubt, have been avoided.

Events proved stronger than Hitler's order. In spite of the superhuman efforts of the troops, the front was pressed back step by step and in some places even torn open. When the force of the Russian attack had finally been spent, the battered army held a deeply bulging line and even had to accept the fact that a substantial body of its troops was cut off.

In these anxious weeks Hitler's dictatorial will ran riot. The man who had prevented the Army Commander-in-Chief from raising operational reserves, and who had even issued the order to disband numerous divisions—an order never in fact carried out by the Army High Command—this same man, now that he was himself Commander-in-Chief, stood facing a vacuum.

Using the strength of his will and his unlimited power, he now brought up, out of all corners of his dominion, forces whose existence he had hitherto successfully been able to conceal from the Army.

Ground warfare Air Force formations, which had long been in existence and up to full establishment strength—something almost unknown to the Army—and S.S. formations in extravagant winter furs, were flown up to the threatened front regardless of the cost in aircraft. They did their best, but could not make up for what had been left undone at Hitler's behest—the timely creation and transport to the front of operational reserves.

The transport crisis was reduced in intensity now that Hitler—hitherto deaf to the urgent appeals of the Army—began as Commander-in-Chief to feel the effects of personnel and material shortages in the railways and used threats of the Gestapo to get rid of stoppages in the civil transport system.

But the brutality of his will led to yet another result.

Without any examination of the circumstances he ignominiously cashiered officers of high repute because contrary to his orders they had made local withdrawals in order to save their troops from annihilation. By this means, even in his first weeks as Commander-in-Chief, he destroyed the principle upon which the Army's leadership had hitherto been based, the principle of confidence.

He set about replacing it by a principle more in

keeping with his own nature—the fear of his revenge. The course of this process, which eliminated the best constructive leadership and put in its place dumb unquestioning obedience, was marked by the ever faster removal of leading soldiers of the old school and by the opportunities for quick advancement thereby given to ambitious gamblers. Its final result was the end of a proud German tradition of leadership.

In the crisis of the winter, Hitler had several times sworn that never again would he permit a situation to develop which would denude the front of its essential reserves. But hardly had the Russian winter offensive come more or less to a standstill than Hitler came forward with a demand for the German offensive to be resumed. With that his intentions concerning the future strategic and operational conduct of the war in the East were made unmistakably plain.

The Army General Staff resisted his demand. In face of Russian resources of men and material, in face of the inadequate strength of the German Army and the condition in which its equipment had been left by the severities of the winter, any attempt to force Russia to peace by an offensive was quite hopeless. The most it could have done, even if the whole of the rest of the front had been denuded of its reserves, would have been to have pushed a comparatively small section of the front a certain distance forward; it could never have brought about a strategic decision. The forces we had available were just about sufficient to straighten out the deep bulges in the line, which would of course have shortened it and thus made it possible to create the operational reserve we required. This might have enabled us to carry through a successful strategic defensive on which the enemy's strength could have ex-

hausted itself until more favourable conditions had been created for a decisive blow.

Hitler could not be convinced; not even the renewed denudation of wide sectors of the front of their last essential reserves could daunt him. His argument was that the Russians were 'dead'. Their winter offensive had consumed the last of their strength and it was only a question of giving a push to what was already tottering. Nietzsche and Clausewitz were quoted in support of his 'heroic' decision.

He now issued a firm order to prepare for an offensive by the Southern German Armies between the Black Sea and Kursk, and gave as its objectives the middle reaches of the Don and the Volga at Stalingrad. Every effort was made to fit the army for its new and by now irrevocable task. Arrangements were made for the troops detailed to cover the attack from the south, to be pushed forward as flanking protection over the lower Don and towards the Caucasus. All forces that could be spared were put in readiness. The Crimean Army was ordered to follow up to the attacking front after completing its primary task of cleaning up the Crimea by the capture of Sebastopol.

On the 28th June 1942 the attack opened in the southern part of the Eastern Front. Having shortly before given drastic and unpleasant proof that it was far from 'dead' by making deep penetrations into the German line both in the south and elsewhere, the enemy now evaded action. When this was pointed out to Hitler he flew into a rage, saying that the rapid progress of the attack was the 'greatest victory in world history' and that the General Staff—who themselves had been unable to find the courage for this attack—wanted, in their conceit, to minimise his success.

While the attack was moving forward, Hitler's pre-conceived idea that all Russian resistance was finally broken led him to pull out the bulk of the Sixth Army's tank formations—just when they were particularly required to deal with stiffening Russian resistance west of Stalingrad—and to send them to the south over the Don. He then gave the forces assembled there a new assignment—the conquest of the Caucasus and a push through to the line Batoum-Baku!

That was something completely new. In place of one single operation, directed uniformly to the East and with its main weight towards Stalingrad, which moreover as far as the south was concerned merely needed sealing off, there were now to be two separate and diverging operations. It might have been possible to take on the two of them at the same time if sufficient troops had been available; never with the weak forces which had been scraped together from the whole Eastern Front and which were barely sufficient to effect a break through even in the one operation against Stalingrad.

But there was worse to come. By unexpected and arbitrary orders from Hitler even these forces were substantially weakened. As a result of Stalin's renewed demands for a 'Second Front' and the mollifying assurance given him publicly by Churchill, Hitler suddenly gave orders for particularly valuable motorised formations to be moved off to the West. As for the Crimean Army, which had just completed the conquest of Sebastopol and whose move up to Stalingrad had been prepared, he unexpectedly ordered them north with the task of taking Leningrad.

These decisions had ceased to have anything in common with the principles of strategy and operation as

they had been recognised for generations past. They were the product of a violent nature following its momentary impulses, a nature which acknowledged no bounds to possibility and which made its wish the father of its deed. They show a morbid overestimation of his own and a criminal underestimation of his enemy's strength. They bring out clearly his mystic obsession with Leningrad and Stalingrad, the twin talismans of Bolshevism, by the capture of which he believed he could rob the system of its last strength. They show the boundlessness of a greedy imagination which, with Goering's strong support, ran riot during those days with dreams of a push through Iran to the Persian Gulf and which led Hitler to bring out secretly prepared 'Oil Brigades' for the Caucasus, expeditionary forces for Persia and even German units to administer those regions.

The Army General Staff opposed these plans with all the strength it could muster. It pointed out that the growing salient to the East and South had continually lengthened the line and that as a result the last reserves had been absorbed. Already Allied forces had had to be put in on the Don to provide an emergency garrison for the newly won line. That would suffice as long as the enemy did not attack. But that he would attack in all good time was shown by plainly recognisable Russian troop concentrations and by the new Russian divisional numbers which were already being reported daily in front of Stalingrad. The operations against Stalingrad were still approaching their climax and there would now be insufficient reserves to see them through.

Furthermore, strong Russian concentrations could also be detected in the Southern Caucasus. An operational counterattack by these forces would put the

German troops in that district—already far too small for the attack on the Caucasus mountains—into a very serious position and might even inflict on them serious damage.

The argument seethed up to boiling point. Hitler stiffened in his opinion that the Russians were 'dead'. In angry words he daily accused the General Staff of lacking 'guts', even of cowardice masquerading as prudence. He ridiculed the reports, now coming in almost every day from reconnaissance and wireless interception, of the continual appearance of new Russian divisions, saying that only completely naïve and simple-minded theoreticians would let themselves be taken in by this clumsy swindle of Stalin.

When he was read a statement compiled from unimpeachable sources which showed that in 1942 Stalin would still be able to muster another one to one-and-a-quarter million men in the region north of Stalingrad and west of the Volga and at least half a million more in the eastern Caucasus and the region to its north, and which proved moreover that the Russian output of first line tanks amounted to at least 1,200 a month, Hitler flew with clenched fists and foam in the corners of his mouth, at the one who was reading this statement, and forbade such idiotic twaddle.

It so happened that in the Ukraine an excellent war history was found describing the Red Army's fight against the White Russian General, Denikin. The course of the front at that time on the Don and before Stalingrad had greatly resembled the front as it was in 1942. Stalin, who had then exercised an authoritative influence over the Red Army's operations—hence the change of name from Zarizyn to Stalingrad—had shown the hand of a master in his exploitation of the weak

points in the Don defences. These were the identical places where, for want of German forces, the line was now held by our Allies, to whom Hitler had given an express guarantee that their forces would not be intermixed with Germans.

It required no gift of prophecy to forecast what would happen when Stalin set in motion against Stalingrad and the Don the army of a million and a half men which was now being formed. It was made perfectly plain to Hitler. The result was the dismissal of the Chief of the Army General Staff.

The short personal conversation which Hitler had with him after his last official conference was characteristic. Hitler complained bitterly of the continual strong opposition which he had met and detailed with exact dates all the many occasions when this opposition had led to dramatic scenes and caused him deep injury. This constant struggle had cost, he said, half his nervous energy and that was more than it was worth. In the tasks which still lay ahead of the Army what would count was 'not military skill but the ardour of the National Socialist creed'—something he could not expect from an officer of the old school. He emphasised the fact that 'the secret of Moltke's success had been the ardour of his belief in the monarchy'. These were the words not of a great General conscious of his military duties and responsibilities but of a political fanatic.

Once again the inevitable happened. Russian attacks broke the Don front where it was held by our Allies, after Hitler, ignoring all advice to give up Stalingrad and content himself with the bend of the Don west of the town, had scraped together the last German troops in the neighbourhood and flung them into the increas-

ingly costly attack on Stalingrad. When, in addition, the Russians broke through south of Stalingrad, the Sixth Army was surrounded. Such a situation is unpleasant, but, from the operational point of view, need not necessarily betoken disaster, which can be averted either by contact being made with the surrounded troops from outside or by the troops inside fighting their own way back to the new front to be created. There were no forces immediately available large enough to burst through the ring round Stalingrad from the outside. What could have been scraped together in the neighbourhood would have needed weeks to assemble and would even then have been too small for a decisive success. In the meantime, the enemy would have long since overcome the crisis which they too in the very nature of things must have experienced after the successful encirclement. There remained therefore only one possible military decision—to give up Stalingrad immediately and to order the Sixth Army to fight its way through to the west. It might even have been possible—although at the cost of valuable material—to inflict considerable damage on the enemy in the process.

If one examines the documents from this period one is impressed by the clarity and unanimity with which this idea was put before Hitler—continually, urgently and almost in the form of an ultimatum. It was made verbally and in writing, by diagram, and by radio messages from the beleaguered Army.

His answer was an inflexible 'No'. Stalingrad had become a point of honour with him. This man, who had held forth often enough and in bitter terms about the senselessness of allowing questions of prestige to influence the conduct of politics or war, now felt that he had arrived at the turning point of his self-bestowed

military fame. This fact and the mystic spell cast over him by the name Stalingrad led him, even at the last moment when he feared he would have to give way beneath the crushing weight of the arguments and entreaties to which he was being subjected, to clutch at the straw of Goering's promise that his Air Force would guarantee to keep the beleaguered Army supplied by air for a whole year.

Any student of war could work out in a few minutes that this promise could never have been fulfilled with the German aircraft available for the purpose. Thus, in spite of the energy with which it was introduced and the self-sacrificing way in which it was carried out, the air lift was never able, even during its short period of maximum performance, to provide more than 40 per cent of the Sixth Army's essential supplies, and for most of the remaining time only a half of that.

When the landing fields had finally become unusable as a result of the progressive compression of the Sixth Army into a steadily diminishing area, supplies sank to only a few per cent of their needs.

In the history of war there are examples in plenty to show that a commander's firmness in a critical hour can be the foundation of great success. One should not therefore complain that serious consideration was given to the question whether the Sixth Army should hold out in Stalingrad and thus tie up strong enemy forces.

Such an idea would have been justified had there been any reasonable chance of exploiting this tie-up of enemy strength by a worthwhile counterblow. But at the moment of the encirclement of Stalingrad no such chance existed.

The prospect of creating one dwindled steadily as Russian pressure contracted the ring round Stalingrad,

as the Sixth Army's strength was consumed, and as the weak German forces, which had been scraped together for the relief of Stalingrad, themselves came under the pressure of Russian attacks. But even in the last stages it would always have been possible, although at the cost of heavy casualties and of abandoning such war material as could not be destroyed, to save at least the majority of the German troops, who by their heroic action had surely deserved it.

In heartbreaking radio messages from the beleaguered army, in imploring words from his military advisers, this responsibility was urgently impressed upon the Dictator. But what were a few hundred thousand German men to this 'great leader'?

If the turning point in the operational conduct of the war in the East had been Kiev, where for the sake of a cheap local success Hitler had handed over the initiative to the enemy, Stalingrad was the turning point of Hitler's zealously built-up military fame and the point from which confidence in his leadership finally began to wane. After Stalingrad not even a Goebbels dared any more to speak of the 'great military leader'.

Certainly one must acknowledge the energy with which the resources of the homeland were now mobilised under the slogan of 'Total War'. This had been demanded by the Army Command even before the beginning of the Eastern campaign—unfortunately in vain. Now there came into being a new Sixth Army. But against an enemy fired by his immense victory, an enemy growing daily in numbers and increasingly aided by deliveries of material from abroad, a stage had been reached in which only real generalship could hope to master—at least for a while—the situation in the East. Time was getting short.

With the gradual collapse of the German front in Africa, with the appearance of strong enemy forces in North Africa, and the enemy preparations becoming increasingly obvious for a landing on the Atlantic coast, the time was approaching when Germany would have to fight for her existence, not just on a second front but on a third as well. Subsequent history showed that this situation was not to be mastered by the 'ardour of the National Socialist creed' alone and without 'military skill'.

The Commanders-in-Chief of the army groups and armies and the military advisers of Hitler in the Army High Command all made desperate efforts to guide him along the only path which would avert the serious operational danger in the East, the only path which promised success—the path of flexible operational warfare, which—similar to the art of the fencer—makes up for what is lacking in size and strength by the alternation of parry and thrust, by the art of generalship and by the achievements of first-class troops.

This art of operational warfare was one of the strong points of the German military tradition, as it had developed through generations under the pressure of war against numerical superiority. To this brutal man of violence Hitler, the whole subject was a closed book. His ideas, derived from the static warfare of the First World War, together with his limitless distrust of the Army Staff, whom he believed he had to subordinate to his personal decision down to the most ridiculous details, led him in the end to issue dictatorial orders for the rigid defence of every square metre.

It is not without interest to follow historically how the Russian military command, which in 1941 came to grief over the principle of rigid defence, later devel-

oped the art of flexible operational warfare and under certain of its Marshals executed operations which deserve full acknowledgment by German standards; while on the German side, the art of operational warfare was abandoned under Hitler's influence and we finished up with an unimaginative system of rigid defence which was ultimately doomed to failure.

The course of this development, which was refreshingly relieved by a number of local offensive operations executed by capable German commanders in 1943 and occasionally even in 1944, cannot be described in detail here. Over it might stand as a title the words coined in acid criticism by the Russians: 'Unmilitary warfare'.

One cannot deny the truth of these words when one remembers some of the things for which Hitler was responsible. Take, for instance, his belief that he could strengthen the German defences by declaring localities selected completely at random to be 'Strong Points'. In his obstinacy and often without any apparent reason he decided that these had to be retained in German hands and so there came to be repeated in miniature a thousandfold the drama of Stalingrad. Then there was the occasion in 1944 when he ordered the last operational reserves to be thrown into Hungary in order to delay the inevitable fate of Budapest. These reserves were desperately needed to deal with a major attack which was obviously threatening the Central Army Group at that time. Finally there was the senseless sacrifice of the Army Group in Kurland. If a decision had been made at the right moment, this Army Group could have been brought back to the remainder of the front without any difficulty. As it was, those of its brave men who did not die for Hitler's incomprehensible obstinacy, are languishing yet in Russian captivity.

## THE ALPINE FORTRESS

WITH the slow but steady retreat of the Eastern Front, which was exhausting its strength in a policy of rigid defence, with the collapse in North Africa, the attack on Italy, the disappearance of Mussolini's régime and the imminent completion of enemy preparations for landings on the south and west coasts of France, it had become unmistakably clear, towards the end of 1943 at the latest, that the war had been lost.

By the sacrifice of German blood and at the cost of exposing the homeland to the enemy Air Forces it could still be kept going for a little longer. But were the results to be gained by such a course worth this sacrifice?

In this matter it was necessary for Supreme Commander Hitler to speak the deciding word, the word which in 1918 Ludendorff had not shrunk from speaking. But not even in this could Hitler rise to the stature of *Feldherr*. He hid behind promises of 'Secret Weapons' which would change the fortunes of war at a single stroke. This weighs more heavily against him than any of his failures in the field of military command.

Would it not, even so, have been possible to beat off the Invasion and thus provide the basis for a tolerable peace? Had the 'Fortress Germany' no hope of consuming the enemy's strength on its walls?

No! Let us once and for all have done with these fairy tales. Against a landing fleet such as the enemy could muster, under cover of a complete and undisputed air superiority, Germany had no means of defence.

In an area commanded by shipborne guns, no land forces can exist unless they have the means of decisively fighting off the ships. We did not have the means either on land, or in the air, or on the sea. It was therefore senseless to fortify the edge of the coast as had been done by Hitler with his Atlantic Wall, and so merely to provide undisturbed target practice for the enemy landing fleet. If one really wanted to deprive the fighting troops of these vast quantities of steel, labour and transport space, which incidentally could have supplied them with thousands of tanks, then the fortifications should have been so located, that by creating fortified zones far removed from the coast, they would have provided secure concentration areas for operational counter attacks, and if need be, bases for a mobile operational defence.

The truth of this was obvious as early as the beginning of 1942, when Hitler first came forward with his plans for the Atlantic Wall and it was pointed out to him unequivocally by the Army High Command. Subsequent experience of the enemy landings at Nettuno fully bore out the forecasts which they had made.

But Hitler was not to be converted. His lack of any understanding of the art of operational command, his completely unproductive conception of the 'Fortress' in terms of building technique rather than of strategy and his propensity for intoxicating himself with size and numbers, led him to see a universal cure in the erection of millions of tons of steel and concrete. It did not help, because it could not help. At no time was the Atlantic Wall any serious hindrance to the enemy landings.

On top of all this Hitler gave orders that his authority must be obtained, even down to details, for the counter-

attacks which had been planned by local operational commanders after the landings. This often required a wait of days at a time.

Thus his methods of command robbed the troops of all initiative and prevented the exploitation of the many good opportunities which were bound to have been provided for an active German defence by the inevitable crises attendant on the landing of an invasion army.

Had the enemy command not allowed itself to be delayed by the expectation of rational German counter-measures they could easily have barred the way back over the Rhine to the German troops operating under the constraint of Hitler's generalship.

Diehards have thought they could see a flash of Hitler's military genius even in the so-called Ardennes offensive of December 1944. No critic can object to the use of the available reserves for an offensive conduct of defence, for example, for the relief of the serious situation round Aachen.

But the forces used in the Ardennes offensive were the last penny in the pauper's purse.

Whether they should have been used offensively at all is a matter which could only be judged in the light of thorough knowledge of the documents, which are now no longer available to us. But in any case, those few divisions, with insufficient fuel, with limited ammunition and without effective air support could not be sent out of the Ardennes with the task of forcing their way through to Antwerp. There is no doubt about their inadequacy for a task of that magnitude. Moreover, an attack which in itself was no more than a pinprick should not have been allowed to lead to the hope that it could turn the remorseless progress of that fate which was even then hastening to its close.

What military problems remained to be solved after the enemy's penetration across the Oder and across the Rhine were for the most part beyond the reach of Hitler's generalship.

In the belief that they could protect their Fatherland, desperately struggling groups of men under commands left with neither communications nor reserves performed remarkable deeds against a force overwhelming in size and fully equipped with all the means of waging war.

But over all this Hitler had no more influence worth mentioning. Within his Berlin shelter and with no military advisers of any standing left around him, he occasionally succeeded in making contact with the outside. Then he gave completely nonsensical orders showing a total lack of understanding of the true situation.

He wanted, for instance, an 'Army' which it had been intended should be formed in the Harz Mountains, but which in fact had never become a real army, to start decisive operations first against the enemy fighting to reach the Elbe and then in the direction of Berlin; then again, after the Americans and Russians had already joined hands near Cottbus, he gave orders to the Army Group desperately struggling in distant Silesia and Saxony, to attack immediately and with every tank it had towards Berlin so as to bring the battle of Berlin to 'a victorious conclusion'. This Army Group was engaged to the last man in defending itself against the onslaught of a superior enemy. It had no armoured formations, no fuel, no ammunition left. This fact was made perfectly clear to Hitler over an underground telephone line which was still functioning. His reply was: 'The Army Group can very well do it, only they will not!'

In such grim farce there ended the career of this

'military genius', a career which had been so loudly proclaimed before the whole world. In its last convulsions it sought cover behind a story which 'whisper' propaganda had been spreading ever since the time of Stalingrad.

'What Hitler willed was right, but the Generals let him down.' His personal failure concealed itself behind the accusation of sabotage.

Two of this 'military leader's' ideas continued to be effective even after all control over the military command had slipped out of his hands.

One was the 'Alpine Fortress'. Many German formations commanded by intelligent officers believed in this and fought on through the most difficult situations in the hope of being able to save their troops for it.

What was this Fortress? Nothing more than a phantom in Hitler's brain. That can be confirmed by anyone, even a layman, who is familiar with the German Alps. Hitler imagined that every German formation no longer able to hold out in open country, could be assembled there, in a region which would offer natural protection against enemy superiority and above all against tanks and aircraft.

If there had been bases in the Austro-German Alps capable of maintaining the supply of rations and of producing weapons and ammunition; if the possibility had existed of refitting the depleted German formations; or if at least sufficient stocks had been piled up there for a year's supply, it would have been understandable that there could be people who believed in this scheme.

There was nothing there—absolutely nothing—apart from the lavish supplies of all kinds in Hitler's castle on the Obersalzberg.

But even if its minimum needs had been available,

could the German Army have retired into the Alps to await the hour of re-awakening, like the legendary Emperor into the Untersberg? Should it have hidden there to reappear on the scene as the deciding factor, or at least as a coveted helper, when the Allies of the East and West had fallen out?

It is not cheap irony to ask such questions after the event.

They are ideas which came from Hitler and which were believed in by people whose military experience should have made them proof against such fantasies. They are a frightening evidence of the destructive effect which Hitler's ideas had exercised over the course of years on the conceptions of warfare held even in military circles.

The other idea was Hitler's order for the destruction of Germany. The country which had been incapable of carrying him to victory, which had shown itself unworthy of his greatness, should perish. Those are not thoughts born of desperation, not impotent rage at the moment of obliteration. They had been expressed by him earlier in all calmness and clarity, both at the beginning of the war and during the Russian campaign.

A Germany which could not be victorious should be wiped out, not by the might of the victor but by Hitler's will, the will of the Supreme Commander and Dictator.

All this will be understood only by those who have had personal experience of Hitler. When he was at the height of his power, there was for him no Germany, however much he may have paid lip service to it; there were no German troops for whose destiny he felt himself responsible; for him there was—at first subconsciously, but in his last years fully consciously—only

one greatness, a greatness which dominated his life and to which his evil genius sacrificed everything—his own Ego, which in an act of self-projection he put in place of the people whom he had once sworn to serve.

Moltke said in 1866 at the outset of his glorious career: 'I have, above all, grown to understand how mighty is the Lord in making the weak strong.' Bismark wrote before Paris in the year 1870: 'Only humility leads to victory; arrogance and self conceit to defeat.' Schieffen speaks of the 'anointing oil of Samuel' which distinguishes the great soldier from other bearers of arms.

All these sayings name the source from which the true leader must draw his strength: a humble submission before God. This source was closed to Hitler. True soldierly leadership in the German tradition is unthinkable without deep realisation of responsibility before God. Hitler was incapable of this. Hence this demoniac man was no soldier leader in the German sense. And above all he was not a great General.

940.54-01343

WEST RIDING

COUNTY LIBRARY

385 022B